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BOOK REVIEWS

Cell, tissue and disease: the basis of pathology. By Neville Woolf. 2nd ed. (pp 503. Illustrated. Paperback £8.50). London: Baillière Tindall, 1986.

It seems almost by accident that Professor Woolf provides, in his preface, a useful definition of the term 'General Pathology'. This book, he claims, is primarily about how diseases happen. Generations of pathologists have struggled with this remit in the attempt to produce an intelligible and reasonably comprehensive text. The first problem is that most medical students are thrown into this subject with little or no background knowledge of the terminology or of the clinical features of disease. The second problem is the weight of tradition and precedent which largely indicates what topics will and will not appear on the Contents page of such a book. Professor Woolf has resolved these problems as well as anyone is likely to do within the format of a pocket-book of 500 pages.

This is a readable book. The subject order is partly dictated by tradition and partly by logic, from cell injury and inflammation through to oncogenesis. After Chernobyl, the author may regret the calculated omission of radiation injury. Similarly, developmental and genetic disease is explicitly excluded. The virtual absence of shock, DIC and pathological fibrosis are regretted by the reviewer. Was it necessary to classify the viruses to the extent attempted, while leaving malaria and other parasitic diseases largely untouched? On the other hand, is it fair, in reviewing a short text for beginners, to criticise gaps in the coverage of a subject as broad and as diverse as medicine itself?

This is a nicely produced and economical book, in the printing of which a single added colour is used effectively for contrast. A brief reading list is provided. There are some half-tone illustrations, a few of which are disappointing, and some useful diagrams. The value of the schematic mice on page 449 remains unclear! Professor Woolf has taken on one of Pathology's most difficult tasks and deserves credit for his success, as reflected in the publication of this second edition. He mostly manages to explain 'how diseases happen' at a level which is scientifically valid and which still remains comprehensible to a junior medical student.

PGT

Basic surgery. By John A McCreadie, Gerard P Burns and Carol Donner. 2nd ed. (pp 656. Illustrated. £24.75). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1986.

This 1986 book appears nine years after the first edition, but there have been few changes in format, length and content. Although the editors and several contributors have Belfast connections, the authors are mainly North American and the book is designed as a textbook and text supplement for medical students and surgical residents. The 35 chapters are grouped into four units — 'Basic considerations', 'Total care of the surgical patient', 'Principles of general surgery', 'Principles of specialty surgery'. The editors emphasise the importance of understanding basic science principles and their application to surgical management. Unfortunately the major fault with this type of book is that the spectrum of material covered allows space for only superficial coverage of physiological concepts and therapeutic applications. Medical students will find the reviews of the metabolic response to injury, immune response, cancer spread and pain management particularly useful, but may have difficulty integrating these basic principles into the management of specific surgical conditions. Surgical trainees will be frustrated by the superficial discussion of most topics and the paucity of up-to-date references but may find it a useful 'aide-memoire' prior to examinations. Many of the illustrations are excellent, presenting abundant information which is easily assimilated, but the colour plates of surgical anatomy add nothing to the book, apart from expense. Indeed, at the recommended price, this book is poor value for money on this side of the Atlantic. Its greatest appeal will be to students who have only limited access to clinical material and who require an easily digested overview of surgical science.

BJR